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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
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An Outline for Selecting Breeding Turkeys

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Select birds individually by handling for the first ten points and by observation of the bird standing or walking for the eleventh points:

I. Head

- A. Bright, round, outstanding eyes of proper variety color. Reject if off-colored, elongated, dull, sunken, injured, blind, or missing.
- B. Short, curved beak. Reject for ostrich beak, cross beak, and elongated beak but not for proper debeaking.
- C. Rugged but refined appearance, free from excess flesh. Reject for coarseness or weak appearance.
- D. Good depth and breadth, not elongated. Reject for crow head.

II. Back

- A. Wide and flat including part over ribs (heart girth). Reject for roach (arched) back, crooked back, narrow heart girth, or torn skin.

III. Breast

- A. Wide but not excessively so. (See text on page 3 and drawings on page 4 regarding selection standards.) Reject if too narrow or too wide and flat.
- B. Parallel to back. (Place one hand on back, the other on breastbone). Reject if rear end of keel appears pushed in or dropped down away from the parallel position.
- C. Smoothly fleshed, width carried well back to rear of keel but not so much as to interfere with locomotion. Reject for heart-shaped breast (very wide in front, very narrow at rear).
- D. Breastbone (keel): straight, moderately long, free from knobiness. Eliminate keels crooked, noticeably curved, too short, decidedly rocker-shaped, decidedly dented, or possessing a knob which is the result of failure of flesh to surround the front point of the keel. Keel bone should be about the same length as the shank.
- E. Check crop region and reject for signs of pendulous crop.

#### IV. Legs and Feet

- A. Drumsticks: plump, well-meated, and of a size sufficient to balance the rest of the body. Reject if undersized or straight-sided.
- B. Shanks of moderate length, strong, sturdy, not too short or too long, not coarse. Reject for legginess or abnormally short shanks.
- C. Reject for off-color, crooked toes, twisted shank, or any tendency toward bowlegs, knock-knees, slipped tendons, swollen hocks, or malformed hocks. One or two slightly crooked toes permitted in females but not in males.

#### V. Wings and Tail

- A. Reject for split wing, slipped wing, twisted or off-colored wing and tail feathers. Clipped wing(s) permitted on females but not on males.

#### VI. Balance

Depends primarily upon leg placement; birds poorly balanced have legs placed too far back. Balance is indicated by:

- A. Keel-leg relationship when bird is suspended by the legs, the body vertical and relaxed. Well-balanced birds show no decided gap between drumsticks and rear end of keel, the profile appearing smooth. Reject poorly balanced birds with a conspicuous gap showing a broken or notched profile. Keel should extend well back between the legs.
- B. Carriage and action. (See Item XI.)

#### VII. Skeletal Proportions

- A. Moderate depth; keel nearly equal in length to the shank in market-age birds; slightly longer than shank in birds 32 weeks and older. Body depth should be about one-fifth greater than length of the keel in all except Beltsville Small Whites in which it should be about one-fourth greater. Measure by calipers or by spread hand. Reject for shallow body or short keel.

#### VIII. Color

- A. Conforming reasonably well to standard requirements. Reject for all standard disqualifications relating to color of plumage,



legs, and feet and also for solidly off-colored beak or eyes. Reject males of Bronze, Bourbon Red, Narragansett, and other parti-colored varieties that do not have male-colored plumage and females that do not have female-colored plumage such as those lacking the normal white edgings on breast and body feathers. Reject Bronze turkeys for completely black backs and complete or almost complete lack of body bronzing and tail penciling.

## IX. Size

- A. Check for weight according to variety and age as shown in Table I, Regulation 22, Miscellaneous Publication 555, The National Turkey Improvement Plan. Weigh representative specimens. Reject for decided underweight or overweight.

## X. Quick Market Maturity (Quick maturing turkeys are more efficient in the use of feed.)

The state of maturity can be checked accurately and effectively only where age is known and then only at 22 to 26 weeks for small-type and 24 to 30 for medium- and large-type turkeys. Quick maturing specimens will have the most market finish at the ages indicated.

- A. Good market finish is indicated by:

1. Fat in skin. Have an assistant hold the bird so that breast skin is relaxed, then pluck a few feathers from the sparsely feathered area between the two feather tracts of the breast at a point just to rear of a line drawn from shoulder to front point of keel. Take a fold of the skin between thumbs and forefingers of both hands. U. S. Special (AA) turkeys will have a creamy skin, a fold of which (containing a double thickness of skin) is about .14 inch thick; U. S. Prime (A), .07 inch; U. S. Choice (B), .04 inch; and U. S. Commercial (C), .03 inch or less. This test is effective only at the point described. Ignore fat in skin at other places on the body.
2. Pinfeathers too short to be plucked cleanly. U. S. Prime (A) dressed turkeys are permitted to have a few short pinfeathers, but only a very small number on the breast. In the live bird, check for pinfeathers too short to be picked on drumsticks, shoulders, and one of the two narrow feather tracts that run parallel to the keel bone and just above it on either side.

Reject birds not showing proper degree of maturity (U. S. Prime or better finish for small-type at 24-26 weeks, or large- and medium-type at 28-30 weeks.) In the absence of a thorough check as above, eliminate all obviously late-maturing specimens, (those that are of only U. S. Commercial quality at the ages mentioned or later.)

**XI. Carriage and Action** (especially important in the selection of males)

- A. Carriage, the bird standing or walking but not strutting: Birds with good balance stand high at the shoulders, the back sloping from front to rear at a 35-40° angle. Reject for front-heaviness.
- B. Action: Gait free, active, and easy. Reject for waddling, limping, paddling (swinging feet outwards), or crippled condition.

**Selection Standards for Breast Type**

The drawings on page 4 represent cross sections of turkeys' bodies at the widest point of the breast slightly to rear of front tip of keel bone. No. 1 is too narrow, No. 2 is acceptable, and No. 3 the ideal, conformation for well-matured turkeys of both sexes and all varieties except those classified as broad breasted. No. 3 also illustrates minimum width for turkeys of the broad-breasted strains and varieties, and Nos. 4, 5 and 6 are acceptable widths for these turkeys, No. 5 being the ideal. Nos. 7 and 8 represent exceptionally wide and flat conformation and are undesirable in turkeys of any age, sex, or variety.



